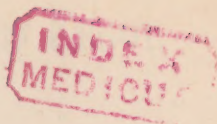
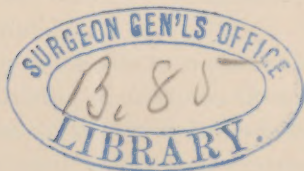


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The Therapeutic Value of Ergot.

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THE THERAPEUTIC VALUE OF ERGOT.

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(Reprint from *The Detroit Lancet*, March, 1879.)

To the earnest physician, studiously engaged in the promotion of science and the rational application of remedies to the cure of disease, there is a pleasant satisfaction in being able to announce, that as medical men, we live in an age of progress and investigation, when the well balanced mind of the medical practitioner is unwilling to receive the *ipse dixit* of others without first submitting their propositions to the crucible of science or at least to the analogical tests of reason and common sense; that practitioners are no longer led by the invisible fingers of superstition to administer remedies recommended alone by the blind followers of tradition.

It is also gratifying to be able to announce that our medical journals and medical societies of to-day are disseminating among the ranks of the profession, the latest discoveries both in appliances and remedies, the result of practical experience and clinical investigation. It is through the medium of investigation and the untiring research it may be in some cases of a life-time, by men of master minds educated in all the collateral branches in the vast field of science, that the profession of medicine is to come in possession of such information as will enable the practicing physician to secure a knowledge of all the valuable uses to which remedies new and old may be applicable.

In discussing the therapeutic value of ergot, it is not necessary that I should enter into any detailed history of this valuable

remedy; and it will be sufficient to call attention in passing to the potency of the remedy under consideration, and that a parasitic fungus character is attached to the grain from the very beginning of its development, which imparts to it, if given in improper doses, or if continued too long, certain poisonous properties. Ergot has long been used empirically in Europe and on the continent by midwives in parturition. It was first brought to the notice of the profession of the United States in 1807 by Dr. Stearns, of Saratoga, New York. The periodicals of that day teemed with laudations of its efficacy in facilitating parturition. They did not appear to know that it possessed any other therapeutic value than that of producing uterine contractions and hastening delivery. They did not enlighten the profession in regard to the indications or contra indications for its administration, except to use it when labor was tardy and protracted.

During the intervening time up to the present, practitioners reasoning from its physiological action and from repeated clinical experiments have discovered that the remedy may be advantageously employed in a large number of diseases, and many have become enthusiasts on the subject of the therapeutic value of ergot.

The principal diseases and diseased conditions in which it may be employed with advantage, and in which its administration is indicated by reason of its known physiological action, may be enumerated: hemorrhages from the uterus, lungs, stomach, nose, bowels, bladder, in a word all classes of passive hemorrhages. In purpura hemorrhagica, writers have attested its marked efficacy, and so far as I have had opportunity of testing its controlling influence over the blood vessels in this disease, I have found its administration to result in well marked benefit.

By injecting this remedy into the varicose veins, it is claimed for it, that it contracts the veins and proves to be an excellent remedy. Hemorrhoids belong to this class and good cures may result from its use.

Administered in the intractable vomiting of pregnancy it

will arrest or so diminish the secretions as to greatly relieve and even cure the disease. There are few physicians who have practiced medicine any considerable length of time, who have not more or less often been under the necessity of exhausting the entire catalogue of remedies, whilst their anxious patients were well nigh exhausted from the incorrigible vomiting of pregnancy. Dr. Smith, at that time vice-president of the Tri-State Medical Society, read a very interesting paper before the society in 1876 on this exceedingly troublesome disease. I can only give the substantial points in this paper from memory, as it has I believe, never been published.

His patient, in the case reported, was afflicted with the vomiting of pregnancy in its most distressing form.

He employed successively all the remedies at hand or of which he could learn, without being able to control the terrible disease. He called in counsel to no better purpose. His patient became so reduced that her life was despaired of. With the consulting physicians in attendance with him at this critical time, it was decided that to produce abortion gave his patient the only remaining chance for her life; but before assuming so grave a responsibility, he decided to consult an old physician some distance away.

A letter was sent describing the alarming condition of his patient, that the doctor might be stimulated to lose no time unnecessarily in reaching the bedside of the almost dying patient. The doctor was too sick to leave home, but as the letter explained the conditions and that the last consultation resulted in an agreement to produce abortion, he advised them to do so without hesitation. Thus fortified, as soon as the messenger returned arrangements were made to carry this into effect. The remedy was at hand and to make sure work a large portion of a strong decoction of ergot was administered to the patient, but instead of producing labor pains, it arrested the vomiting, the patient took a good refreshing sleep, awoke with a desire for food, went on to the full term and gave birth to a healthy living child.

This accidental discovery of the specific effect of ergot in the vomiting of pregnancy, induced Dr. Smith and all the physicians who became acquainted with this case, to adopt it as the remedy in this disease, and they declare they have never been disappointed in its good effects. I have treated some cases of heamaturia with unmistakably good results. The remedy appears to exert its good effects in this disease as it does in many others, by contracting and lessening the calibre of the veins and arteries through its peculiar power of contracting muscular fibre, and in this manner arrests hemorrhage. It also arrests profuse perspiration by contracting the capillaries, and the same good office may be realized on all undue secretions and secreting canals.

In treatment of tumors of the uterus, its contracting power over the muscles of the organ forces the tumor down, and facilitates its removal. As in these cases there is nearly always hemorrhage, the remedy is of signal service as a hemostatic.

In chronic sub-acute metritis it lessens the vascularity of the organ by contracting the blood vessels, and by inducing a state of tonic contraction aids in securing a healthy tone of the organ.

In leucorrhœa and profuse menstruation associated together it fulfills all the indications, and will be found an excellent remedy.

In that sad and disgusting infirmity, incontinence of urine, where the contractility of the bladder has been impaired by relaxation of its coats, or from immoderate distention, we possess in ergot, when systematically administered, a remedy peculiarly adapted to the contraction of the muscular fibres, and so giving tone to the coats of the organ as to cure vesical paralysis, upon which this disease usually depends.

Where cases of hematemeses have resisted the usual remedies, such as lead, opium and sulphuric acid, ergot has been reported successful, with no more vomiting of blood after the second dose. Its internal administration in cases of this kind is recommended by the fact that it is neither a stimulant nor an excitant.

The well established power possessed by ergot over the circular muscular fibres has suggested the use of this remedy in pneumonia, and the results have been most satisfactory, "in some cases creating quite an enthusiasm in its favor; the temperature was reduced, dyspnœa less troublesome, sputum containing less blood, cough much less painful and less frequent; indeed, marked improvement in all the symptoms." It has recently been claimed for it that it possesses the power of aborting pneumonia.

In gonorrhœa and gleet and in spermatorrhœa, good results are claimed to have been secured from the administration of the remedy.

In view of its physiological action we may expect good results in diarrhœa, particularly where dysenteric symptoms are found. It will exert a good influence over derangements of the heart, especially where the cardiac action is enfeebled.

Ergot meets all the indications in the treatment of whooping cough by arresting undue secretion, and contracting over-distended blood-vessels. The same power gives to it a prominence in the treatment of enlargement of the spleen.

Its physiological control over the blood-vessels of the spinal cord and brain, gives this remedy a specific influence over their congestions and inflammations and in the delirium of low congestive forms of fever. In the hospitals of Europe they are now treating severe cases of typhoid fever with the remedy in question.

I shall condense the statement of the first of a number of cases reported from the Hospital Lariboisiere, admitted on 12th day of the disease. The tongue was very dry and brown, the gums were covered with sordes, speech was difficult, and the ideas confused. At night there was constant delirium, with subsultus and other nervous phenomena, great pain in the back of the neck, opisthotonos at times, and symptoms like meningitis. The next day the abdomen was retracted and signs of collapse seemed to portend an early death. Thirty grains of ergot given during the day. On the following morning there was a considerable modification of all the grave symptoms. The

muscular twitchings had ceased, the abdomen less drawn in, and the general condition improved. The ergot was continued three days, after which time indications of danger had entirely disappeared, and the fever ran its course with moderate severity.

As a reliable and indispensable remedy in uterine hemorrhages it has no equal; and in inertia of the uterus for increasing both the force and frequency of the contractions and the expulsive power of the uterus in parturition, its efficacy and value are well understood and freely admitted by the profession. So much has recently been written attesting the therapeutic value of ergot, that it will prove both a subject of interest and profit to all who will undertake its perusal.

Dr. John L. Cook claimed that ergot was a remedy of much value in the treatment of yellow fever, especially in the hemorrhagic forms of that disease. That its administration would be indicated in all acute inflammations in the congestive stages, before exudation, as it diminishes heat by reducing the capacity of the capillary circulation, and by contracting the blood-vessels would greatly tend to arrest undue secretion and hemorrhage, which is found to be a troublesome characteristic in this class of diseases.